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Beauty and the Beast

retold by

Rosemary Harris

Illustrated by

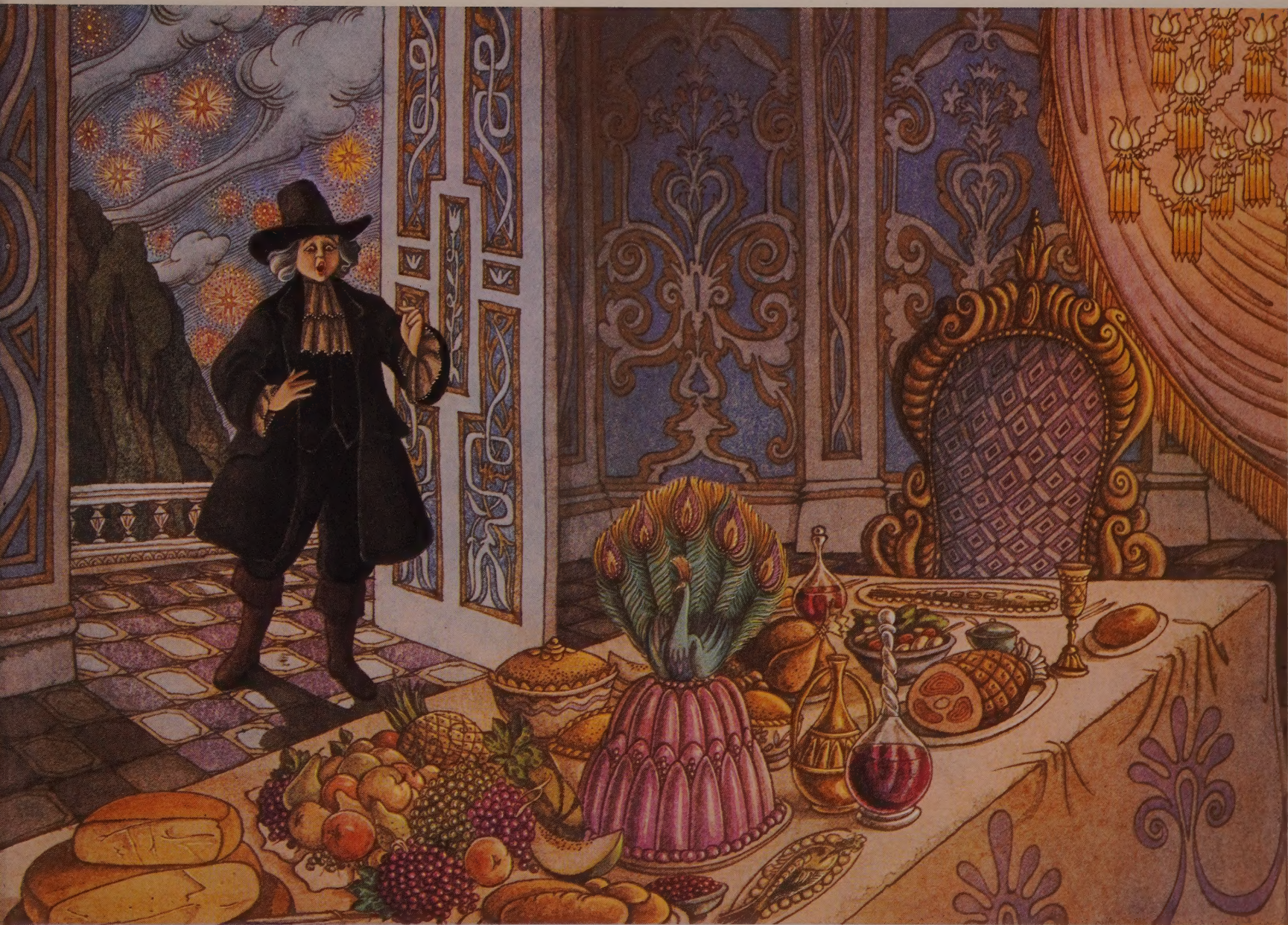
Errol Le Cain



'A rose' Beauty said when her father
asked her what she wanted as a special
present - but when her father tried to pick
a flower from the Beast's garden, the
Beast demanded that Beauty come
herself to save her father's life!
A classic fairy story.

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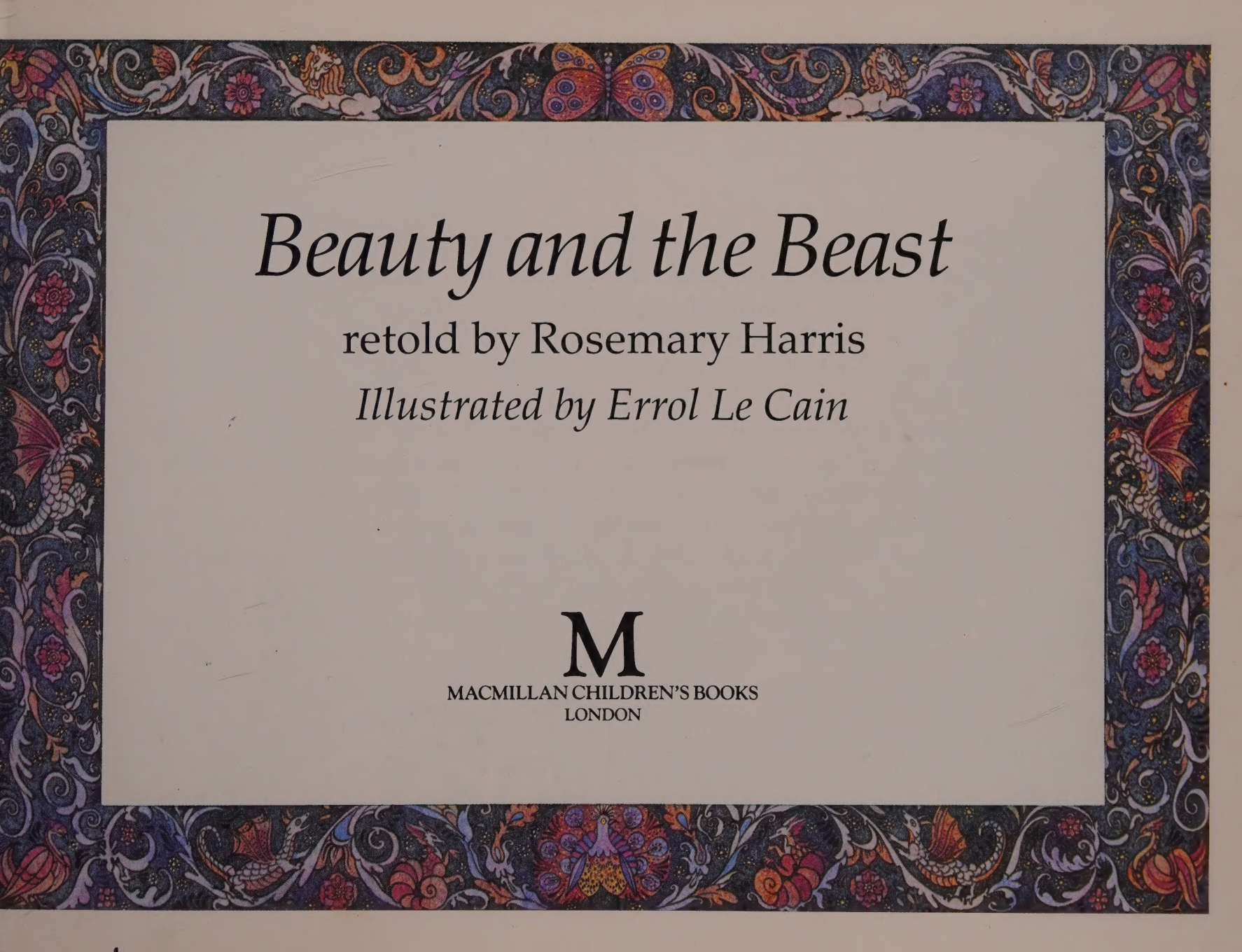
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The book cover features a wide, ornate border with a dark blue background. It is decorated with intricate, colorful patterns including stylized flowers, swirling vines, and mythical creatures like dragons and unicorns. The central text is set against a plain white background.

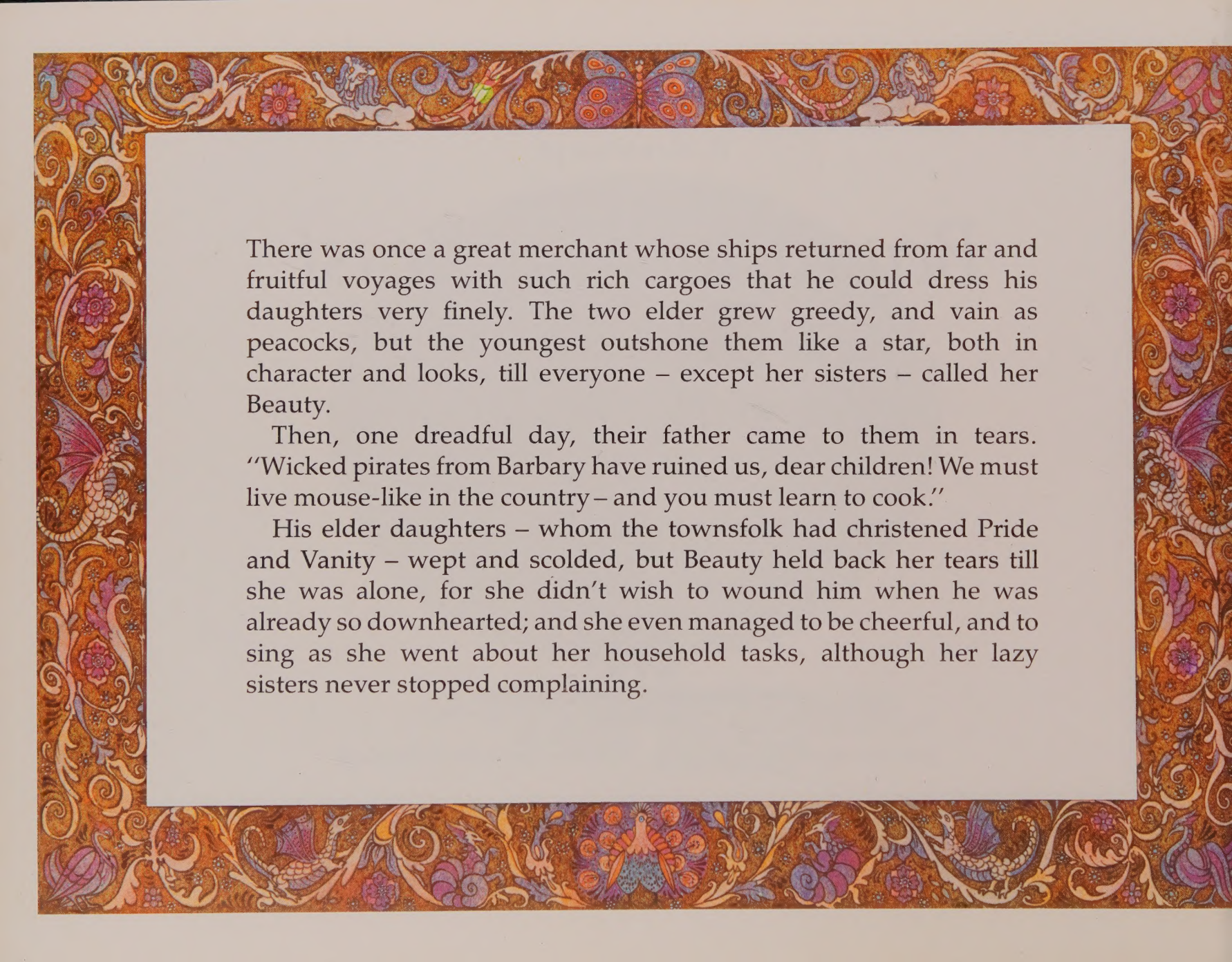
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LONDON



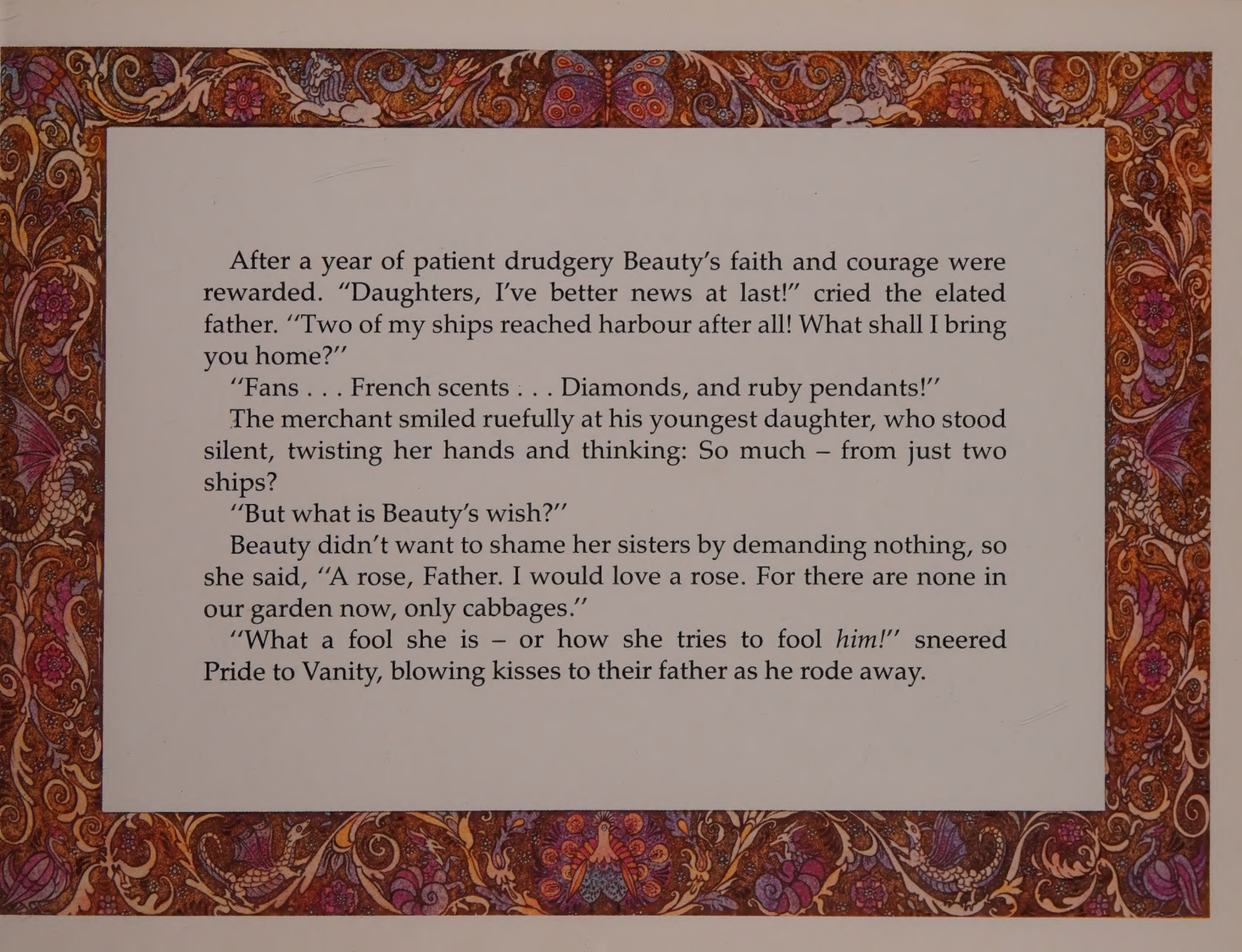
There was once a great merchant whose ships returned from far and fruitful voyages with such rich cargoes that he could dress his daughters very finely. The two elder grew greedy, and vain as peacocks, but the youngest outshone them like a star, both in character and looks, till everyone – except her sisters – called her Beauty.

Then, one dreadful day, their father came to them in tears. “Wicked pirates from Barbary have ruined us, dear children! We must live mouse-like in the country – and you must learn to cook.”

His elder daughters – whom the townsfolk had christened Pride and Vanity – wept and scolded, but Beauty held back her tears till she was alone, for she didn’t wish to wound him when he was already so downhearted; and she even managed to be cheerful, and to sing as she went about her household tasks, although her lazy sisters never stopped complaining.







After a year of patient drudgery Beauty's faith and courage were rewarded. "Daughters, I've better news at last!" cried the elated father. "Two of my ships reached harbour after all! What shall I bring you home?"

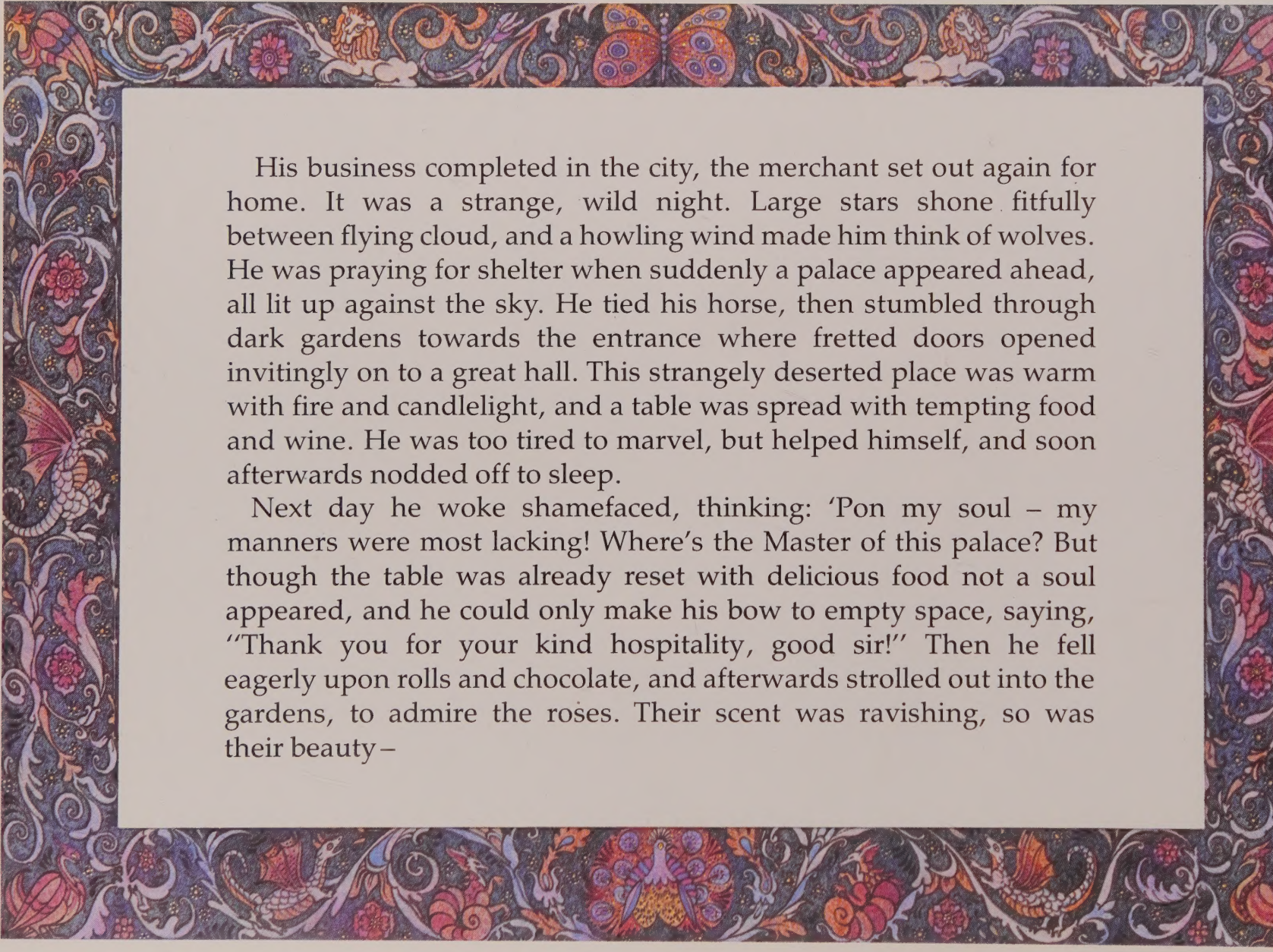
"Fans . . . French scents . . . Diamonds, and ruby pendants!"

The merchant smiled ruefully at his youngest daughter, who stood silent, twisting her hands and thinking: So much – from just two ships?

"But what is Beauty's wish?"

Beauty didn't want to shame her sisters by demanding nothing, so she said, "A rose, Father. I would love a rose. For there are none in our garden now, only cabbages."

"What a fool she is – or how she tries to fool *him!*" sneered Pride to Vanity, blowing kisses to their father as he rode away.

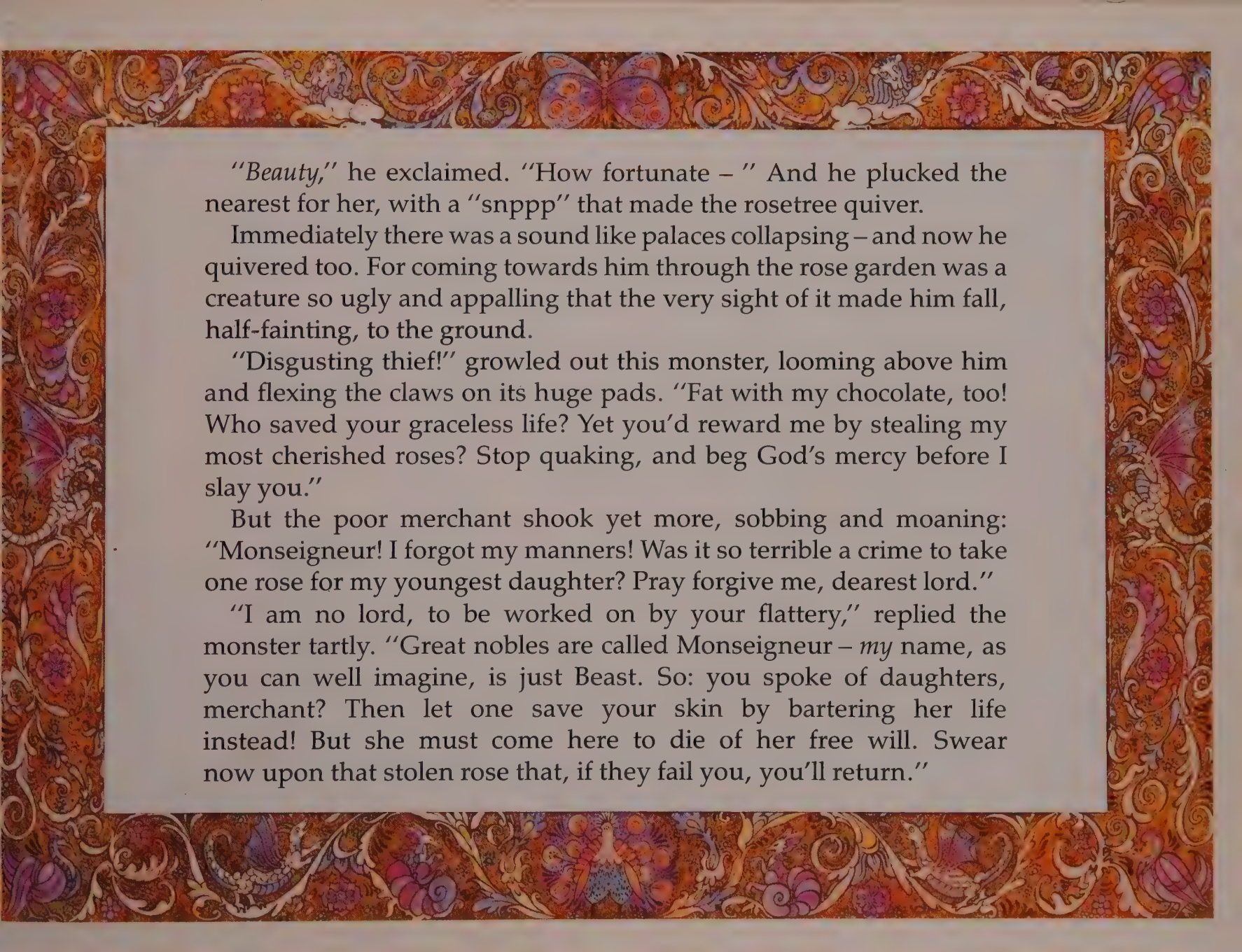


His business completed in the city, the merchant set out again for home. It was a strange, wild night. Large stars shone fitfully between flying cloud, and a howling wind made him think of wolves. He was praying for shelter when suddenly a palace appeared ahead, all lit up against the sky. He tied his horse, then stumbled through dark gardens towards the entrance where fretted doors opened invitingly on to a great hall. This strangely deserted place was warm with fire and candlelight, and a table was spread with tempting food and wine. He was too tired to marvel, but helped himself, and soon afterwards nodded off to sleep.

Next day he woke shamefaced, thinking: 'Pon my soul – my manners were most lacking! Where's the Master of this palace? But though the table was already reset with delicious food not a soul appeared, and he could only make his bow to empty space, saying, "Thank you for your kind hospitality, good sir!" Then he fell eagerly upon rolls and chocolate, and afterwards strolled out into the gardens, to admire the roses. Their scent was ravishing, so was their beauty –







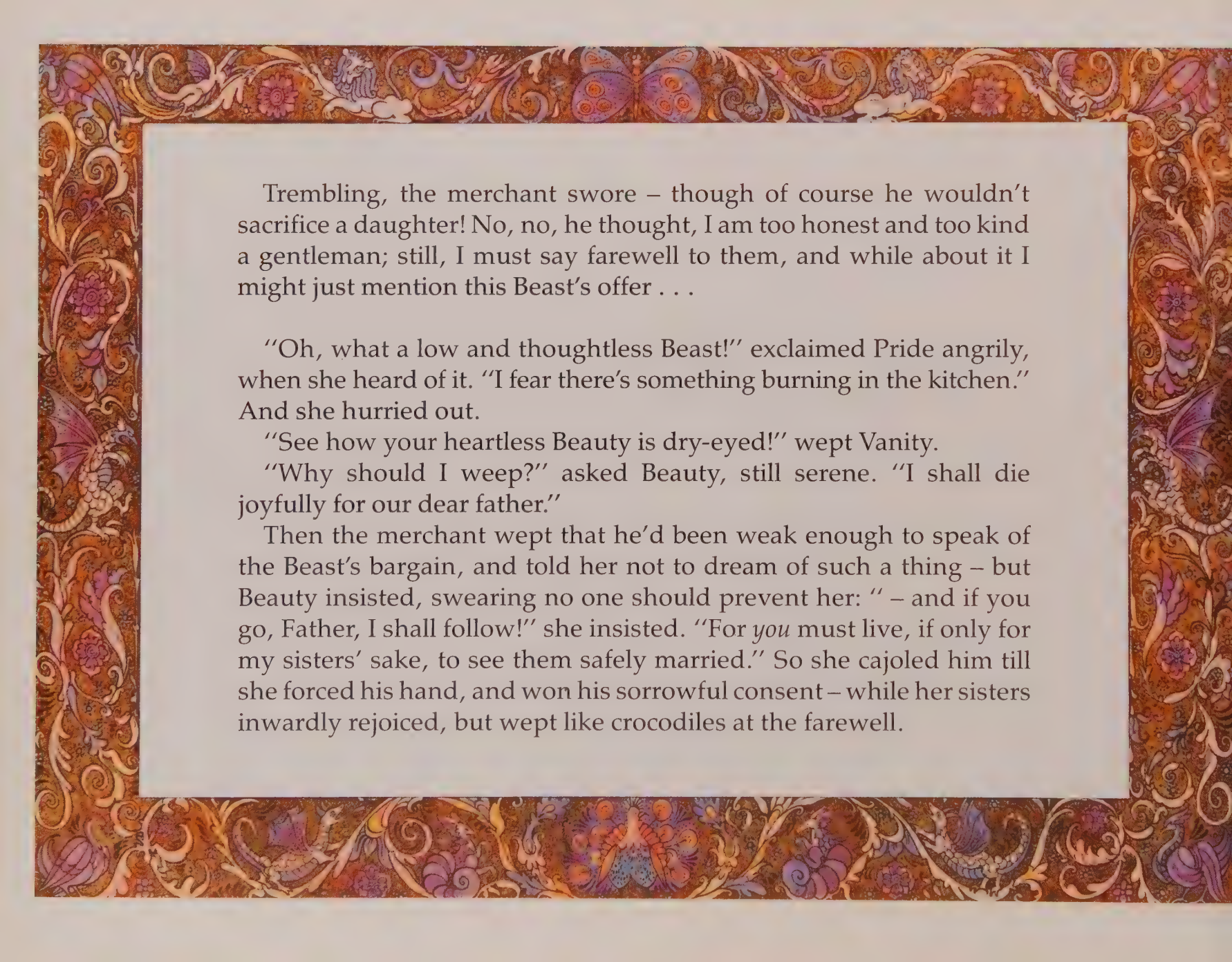
"Beauty," he exclaimed. "How fortunate – " And he plucked the nearest for her, with a "snppp" that made the rosetree quiver.

Immediately there was a sound like palaces collapsing – and now he quivered too. For coming towards him through the rose garden was a creature so ugly and appalling that the very sight of it made him fall, half-fainting, to the ground.

"Disgusting thief!" growled out this monster, looming above him and flexing the claws on its huge pads. "Fat with my chocolate, too! Who saved your graceless life? Yet you'd reward me by stealing my most cherished roses? Stop quaking, and beg God's mercy before I slay you."

But the poor merchant shook yet more, sobbing and moaning: "Monseigneur! I forgot my manners! Was it so terrible a crime to take one rose for my youngest daughter? Pray forgive me, dearest lord."

"I am no lord, to be worked on by your flattery," replied the monster tartly. "Great nobles are called Monseigneur – *my* name, as you can well imagine, is just Beast. So: you spoke of daughters, merchant? Then let one save your skin by bartering her life instead! But she must come here to die of her free will. Swear now upon that stolen rose that, if they fail you, you'll return."



Trembling, the merchant swore – though of course he wouldn't sacrifice a daughter! No, no, he thought, I am too honest and too kind a gentleman; still, I must say farewell to them, and while about it I might just mention this Beast's offer . . .

"Oh, what a low and thoughtless Beast!" exclaimed Pride angrily, when she heard of it. "I fear there's something burning in the kitchen." And she hurried out.

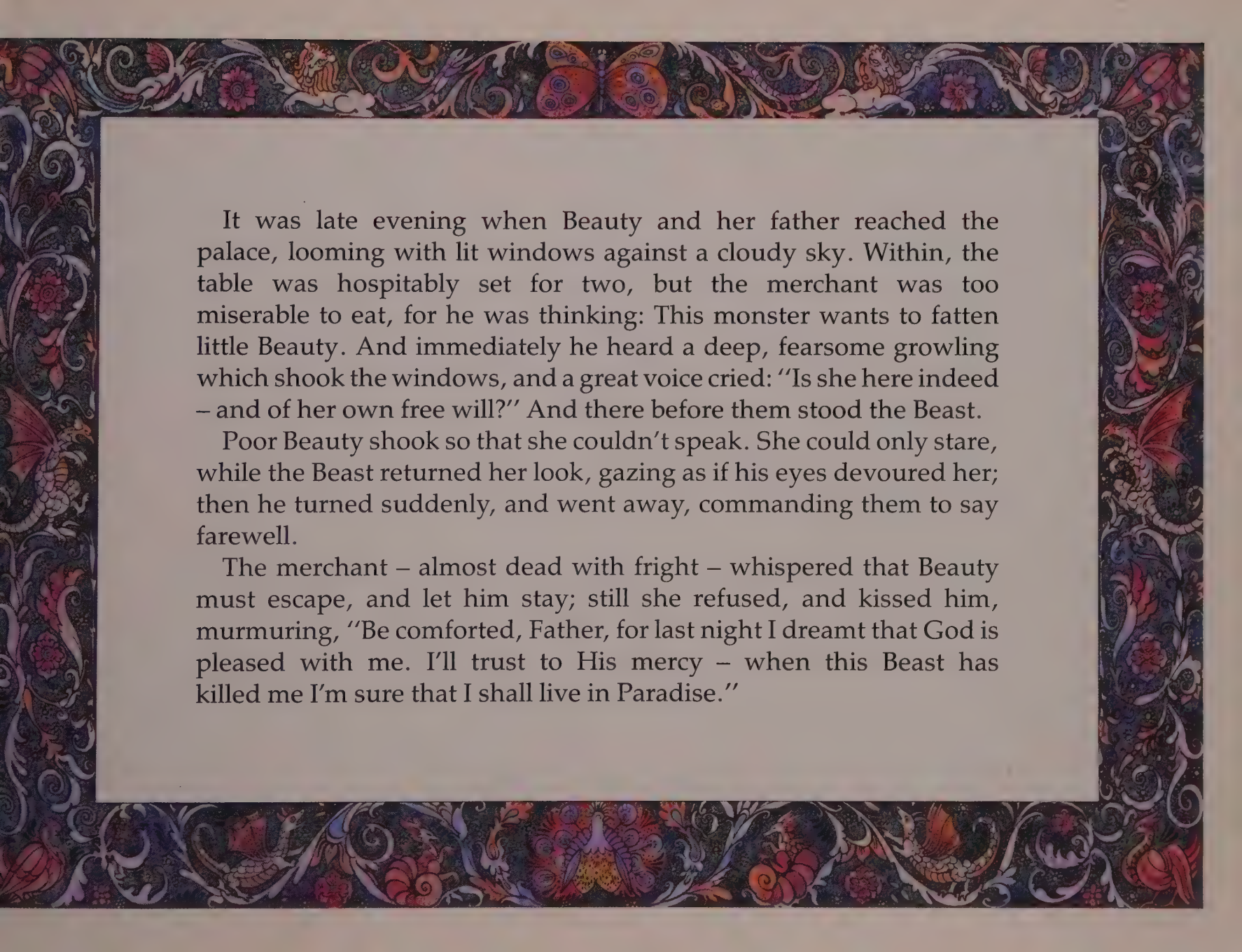
"See how your heartless Beauty is dry-eyed!" wept Vanity.

"Why should I weep?" asked Beauty, still serene. "I shall die joyfully for our dear father."

Then the merchant wept that he'd been weak enough to speak of the Beast's bargain, and told her not to dream of such a thing – but Beauty insisted, swearing no one should prevent her: " – and if you go, Father, I shall follow!" she insisted. "For *you* must live, if only for my sisters' sake, to see them safely married." So she cajoled him till she forced his hand, and won his sorrowful consent – while her sisters inwardly rejoiced, but wept like crocodiles at the farewell.



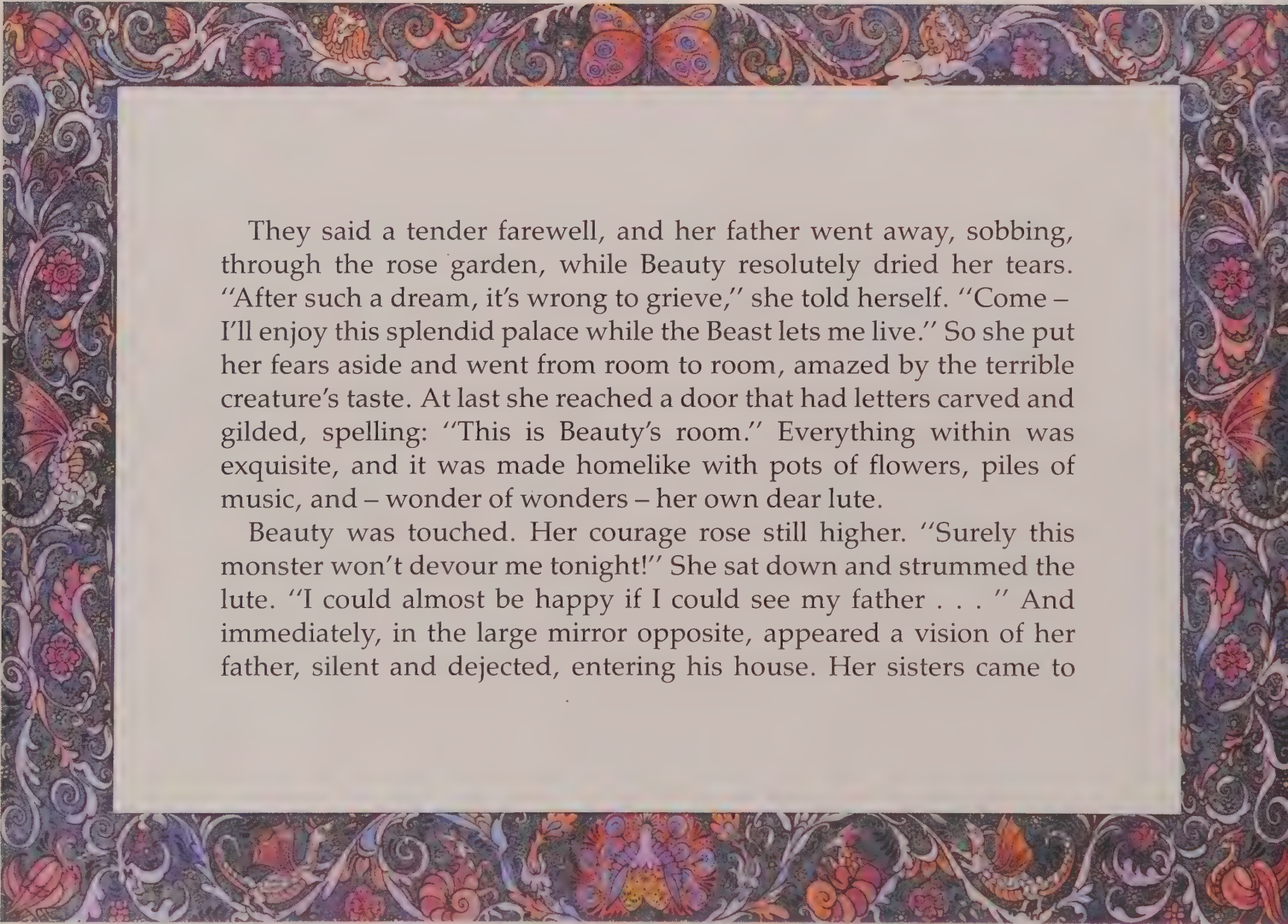




It was late evening when Beauty and her father reached the palace, looming with lit windows against a cloudy sky. Within, the table was hospitably set for two, but the merchant was too miserable to eat, for he was thinking: This monster wants to fatten little Beauty. And immediately he heard a deep, fearsome growling which shook the windows, and a great voice cried: "Is she here indeed – and of her own free will?" And there before them stood the Beast.

Poor Beauty shook so that she couldn't speak. She could only stare, while the Beast returned her look, gazing as if his eyes devoured her; then he turned suddenly, and went away, commanding them to say farewell.

The merchant – almost dead with fright – whispered that Beauty must escape, and let him stay; still she refused, and kissed him, murmuring, "Be comforted, Father, for last night I dreamt that God is pleased with me. I'll trust to His mercy – when this Beast has killed me I'm sure that I shall live in Paradise."

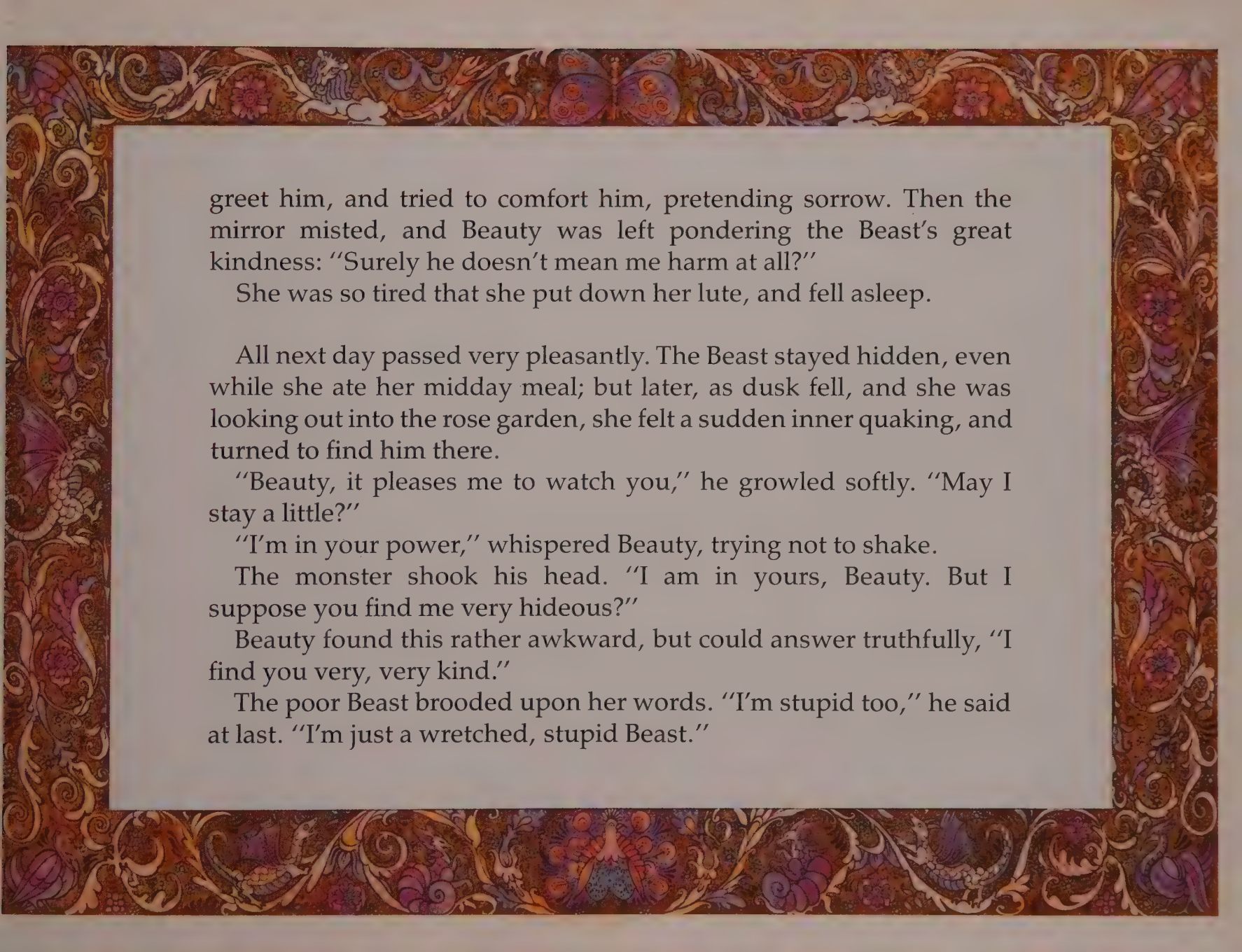


They said a tender farewell, and her father went away, sobbing, through the rose garden, while Beauty resolutely dried her tears. "After such a dream, it's wrong to grieve," she told herself. "Come – I'll enjoy this splendid palace while the Beast lets me live." So she put her fears aside and went from room to room, amazed by the terrible creature's taste. At last she reached a door that had letters carved and gilded, spelling: "This is Beauty's room." Everything within was exquisite, and it was made homelike with pots of flowers, piles of music, and – wonder of wonders – her own dear lute.

Beauty was touched. Her courage rose still higher. "Surely this monster won't devour me tonight!" She sat down and strummed the lute. "I could almost be happy if I could see my father . . . " And immediately, in the large mirror opposite, appeared a vision of her father, silent and dejected, entering his house. Her sisters came to







greet him, and tried to comfort him, pretending sorrow. Then the mirror misted, and Beauty was left pondering the Beast's great kindness: "Surely he doesn't mean me harm at all?"

She was so tired that she put down her lute, and fell asleep.

All next day passed very pleasantly. The Beast stayed hidden, even while she ate her midday meal; but later, as dusk fell, and she was looking out into the rose garden, she felt a sudden inner quaking, and turned to find him there.

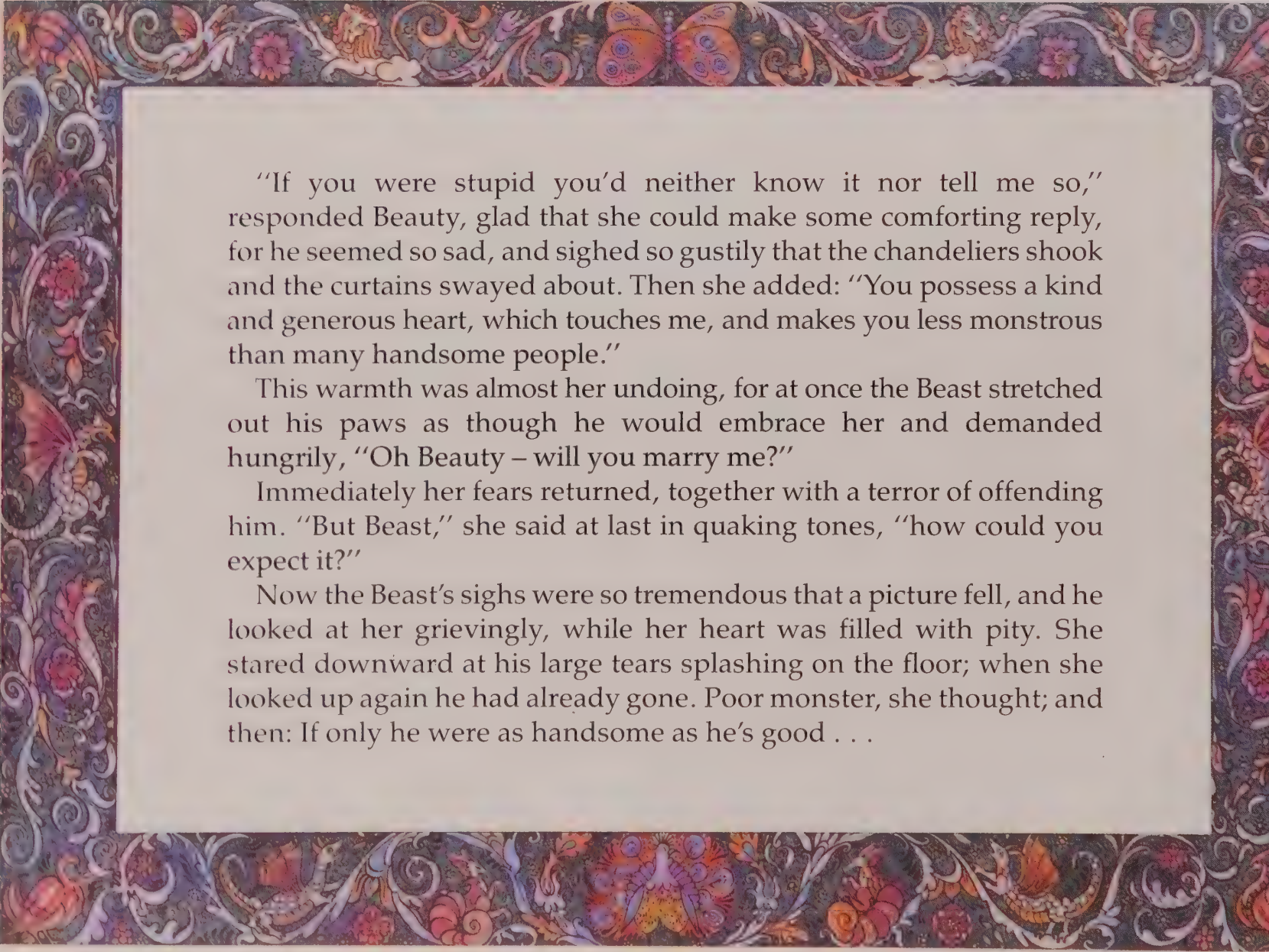
"Beauty, it pleases me to watch you," he growled softly. "May I stay a little?"

"I'm in your power," whispered Beauty, trying not to shake.

The monster shook his head. "I am in yours, Beauty. But I suppose you find me very hideous?"

Beauty found this rather awkward, but could answer truthfully, "I find you very, very kind."

The poor Beast brooded upon her words. "I'm stupid too," he said at last. "I'm just a wretched, stupid Beast."



"If you were stupid you'd neither know it nor tell me so," responded Beauty, glad that she could make some comforting reply, for he seemed so sad, and sighed so gustily that the chandeliers shook and the curtains swayed about. Then she added: "You possess a kind and generous heart, which touches me, and makes you less monstrous than many handsome people."

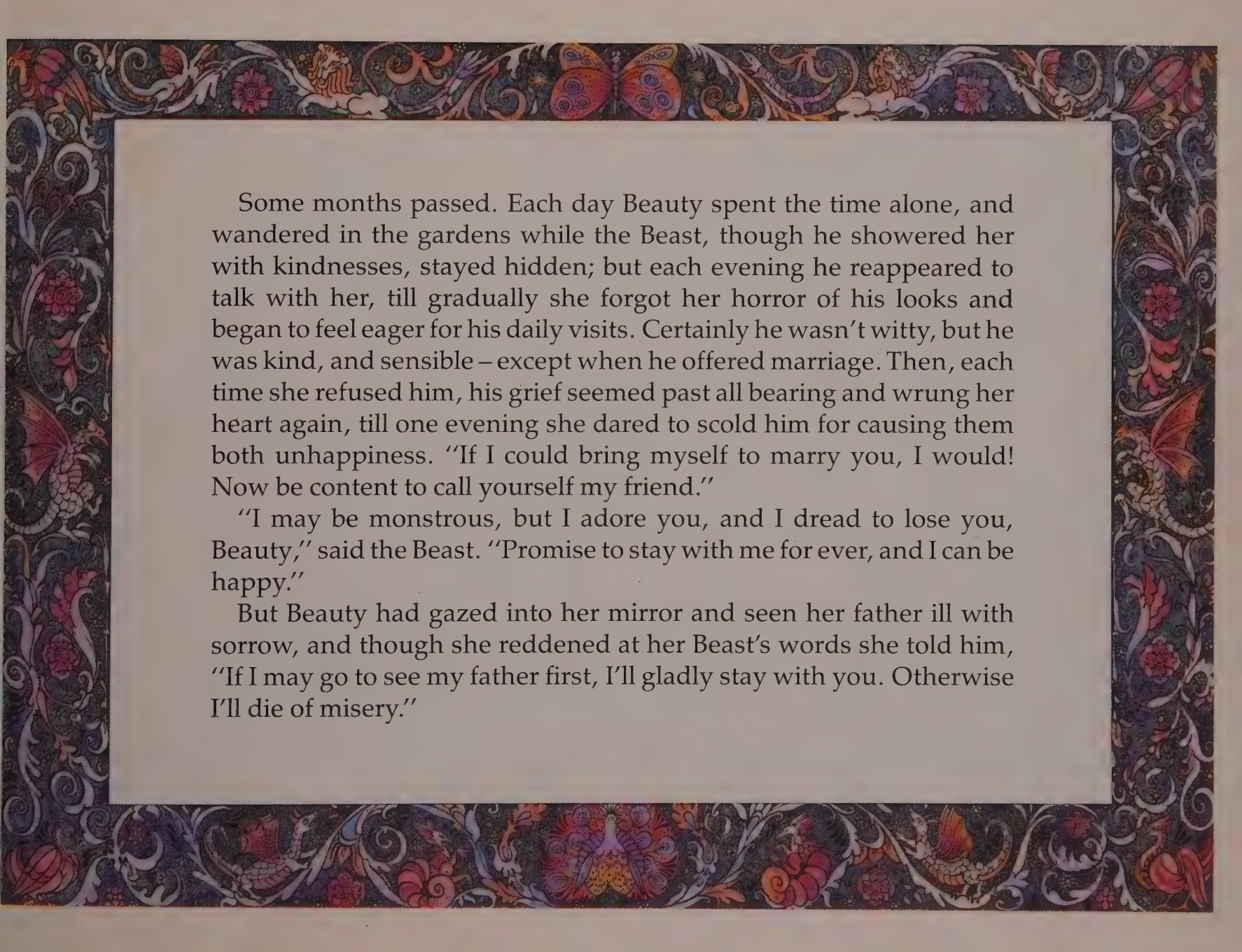
This warmth was almost her undoing, for at once the Beast stretched out his paws as though he would embrace her and demanded hungrily, "Oh Beauty – will you marry me?"

Immediately her fears returned, together with a terror of offending him. "But Beast," she said at last in quaking tones, "how could you expect it?"

Now the Beast's sighs were so tremendous that a picture fell, and he looked at her grievingly, while her heart was filled with pity. She stared downward at his large tears splashing on the floor; when she looked up again he had already gone. Poor monster, she thought; and then: If only he were as handsome as he's good . . .



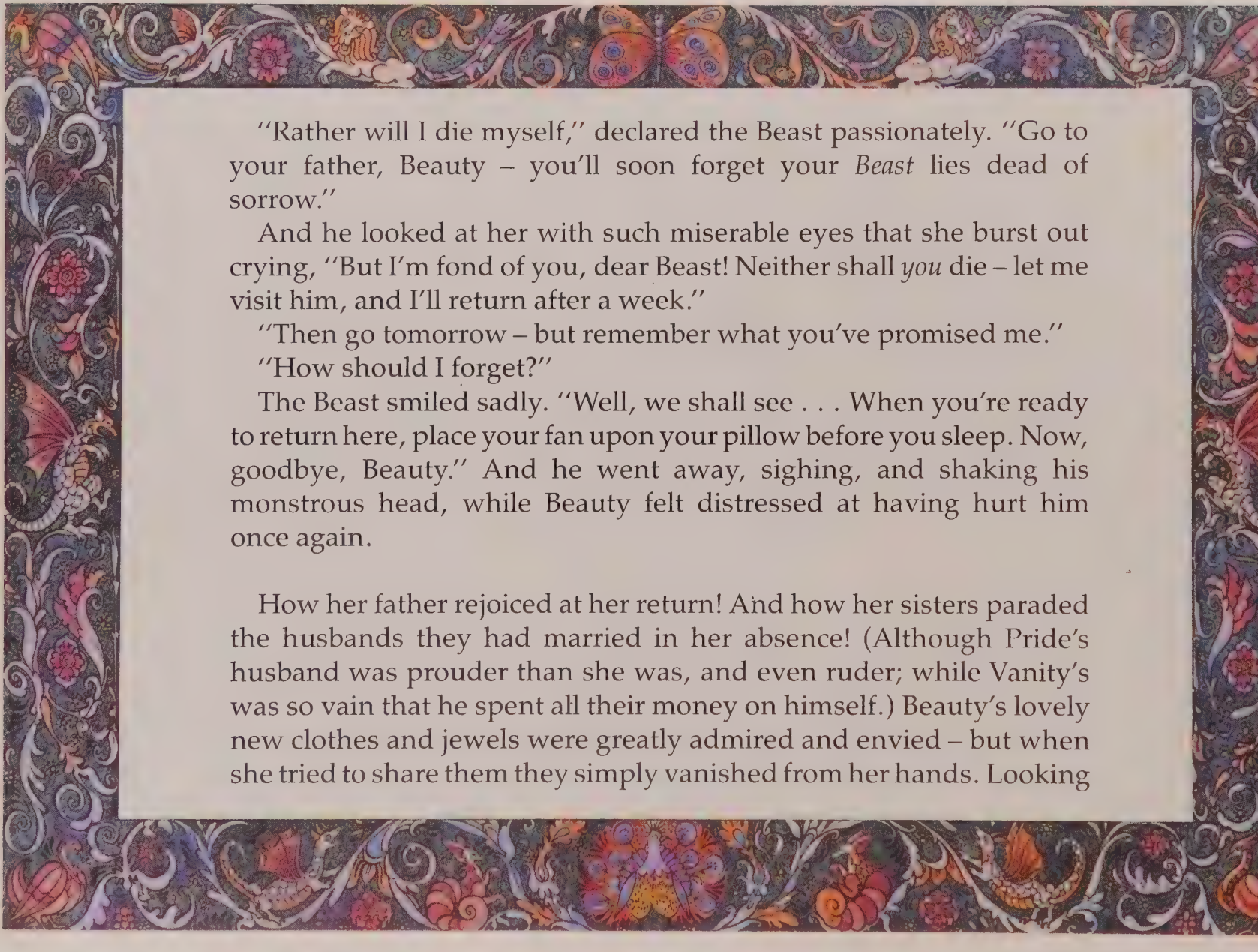




Some months passed. Each day Beauty spent the time alone, and wandered in the gardens while the Beast, though he showered her with kindnesses, stayed hidden; but each evening he reappeared to talk with her, till gradually she forgot her horror of his looks and began to feel eager for his daily visits. Certainly he wasn't witty, but he was kind, and sensible – except when he offered marriage. Then, each time she refused him, his grief seemed past all bearing and wrung her heart again, till one evening she dared to scold him for causing them both unhappiness. "If I could bring myself to marry you, I would! Now be content to call yourself my friend."

"I may be monstrous, but I adore you, and I dread to lose you, Beauty," said the Beast. "Promise to stay with me for ever, and I can be happy."

But Beauty had gazed into her mirror and seen her father ill with sorrow, and though she reddened at her Beast's words she told him, "If I may go to see my father first, I'll gladly stay with you. Otherwise I'll die of misery."



“Rather will I die myself,” declared the Beast passionately. “Go to your father, Beauty – you’ll soon forget your *Beast* lies dead of sorrow.”

And he looked at her with such miserable eyes that she burst out crying, “But I’m fond of you, dear Beast! Neither shall *you* die – let me visit him, and I’ll return after a week.”

“Then go tomorrow – but remember what you’ve promised me.”

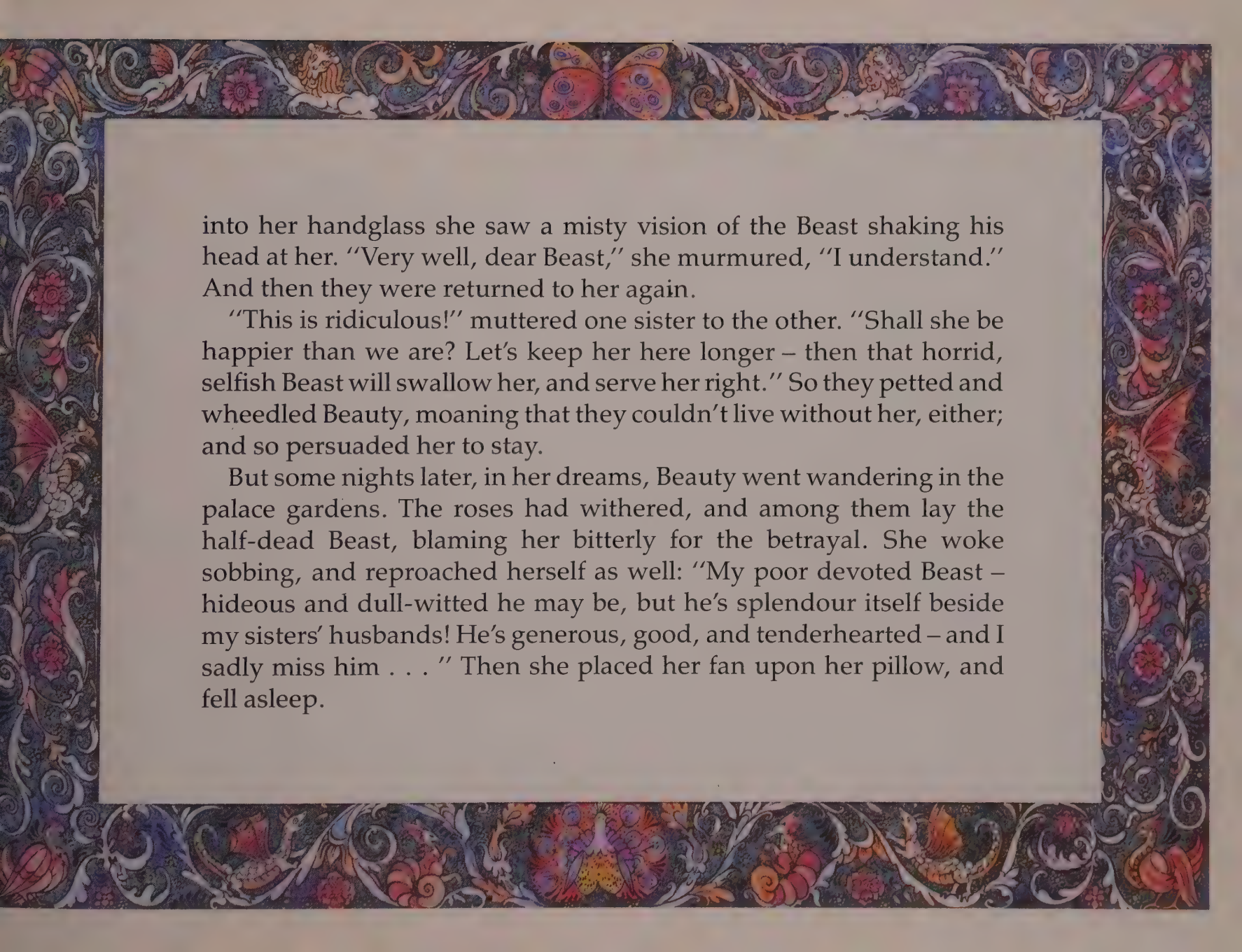
“How should I forget?”

The Beast smiled sadly. “Well, we shall see . . . When you’re ready to return here, place your fan upon your pillow before you sleep. Now, goodbye, Beauty.” And he went away, sighing, and shaking his monstrous head, while Beauty felt distressed at having hurt him once again.

How her father rejoiced at her return! And how her sisters paraded the husbands they had married in her absence! (Although Pride’s husband was prouder than she was, and even ruder; while Vanity’s was so vain that he spent all their money on himself.) Beauty’s lovely new clothes and jewels were greatly admired and envied – but when she tried to share them they simply vanished from her hands. Looking



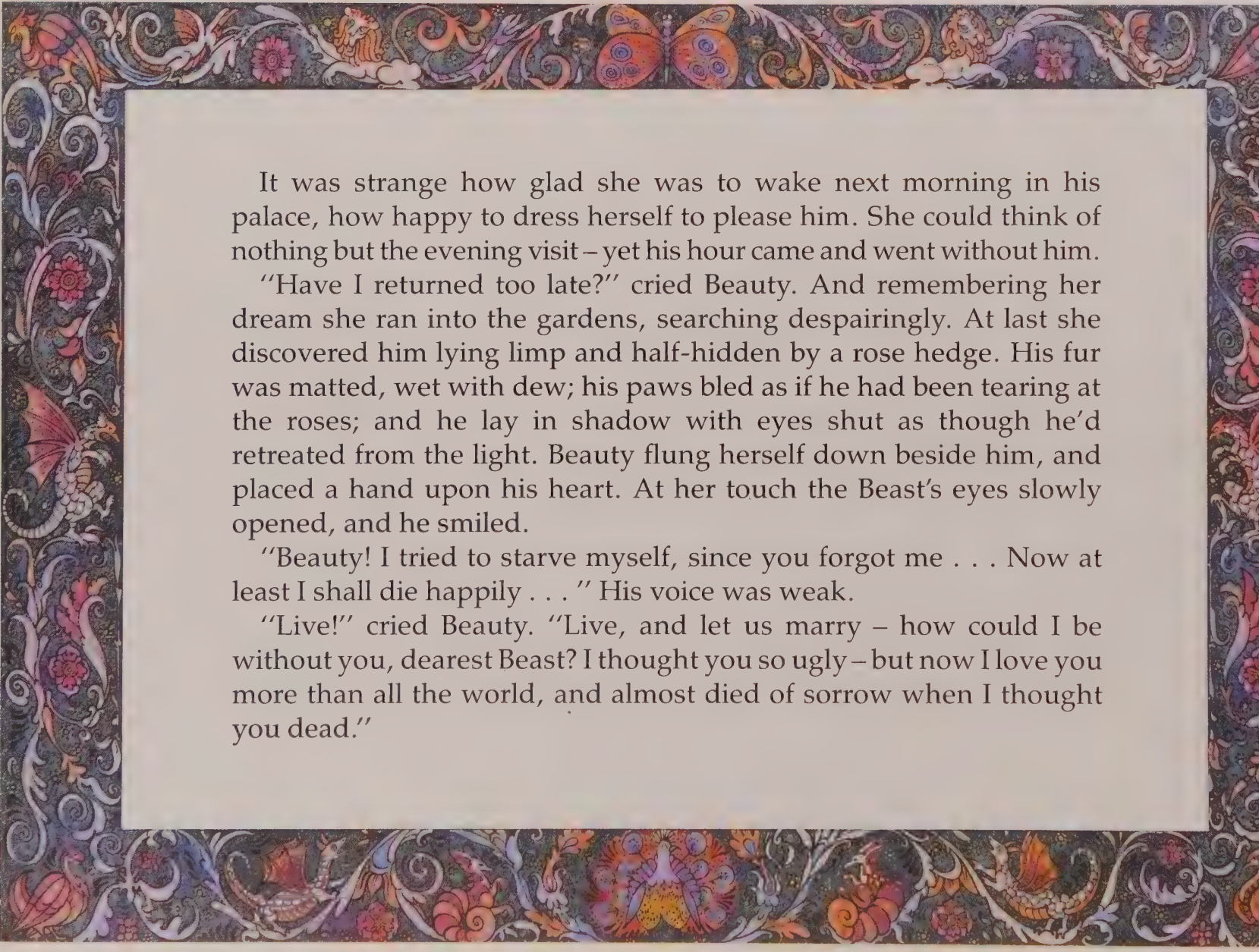




into her handglass she saw a misty vision of the Beast shaking his head at her. "Very well, dear Beast," she murmured, "I understand." And then they were returned to her again.

"This is ridiculous!" muttered one sister to the other. "Shall she be happier than we are? Let's keep her here longer – then that horrid, selfish Beast will swallow her, and serve her right." So they petted and wheedled Beauty, moaning that they couldn't live without her, either; and so persuaded her to stay.

But some nights later, in her dreams, Beauty went wandering in the palace gardens. The roses had withered, and among them lay the half-dead Beast, blaming her bitterly for the betrayal. She woke sobbing, and reproached herself as well: "My poor devoted Beast – hideous and dull-witted he may be, but he's splendour itself beside my sisters' husbands! He's generous, good, and tenderhearted – and I sadly miss him . . ." Then she placed her fan upon her pillow, and fell asleep.



It was strange how glad she was to wake next morning in his palace, how happy to dress herself to please him. She could think of nothing but the evening visit – yet his hour came and went without him.

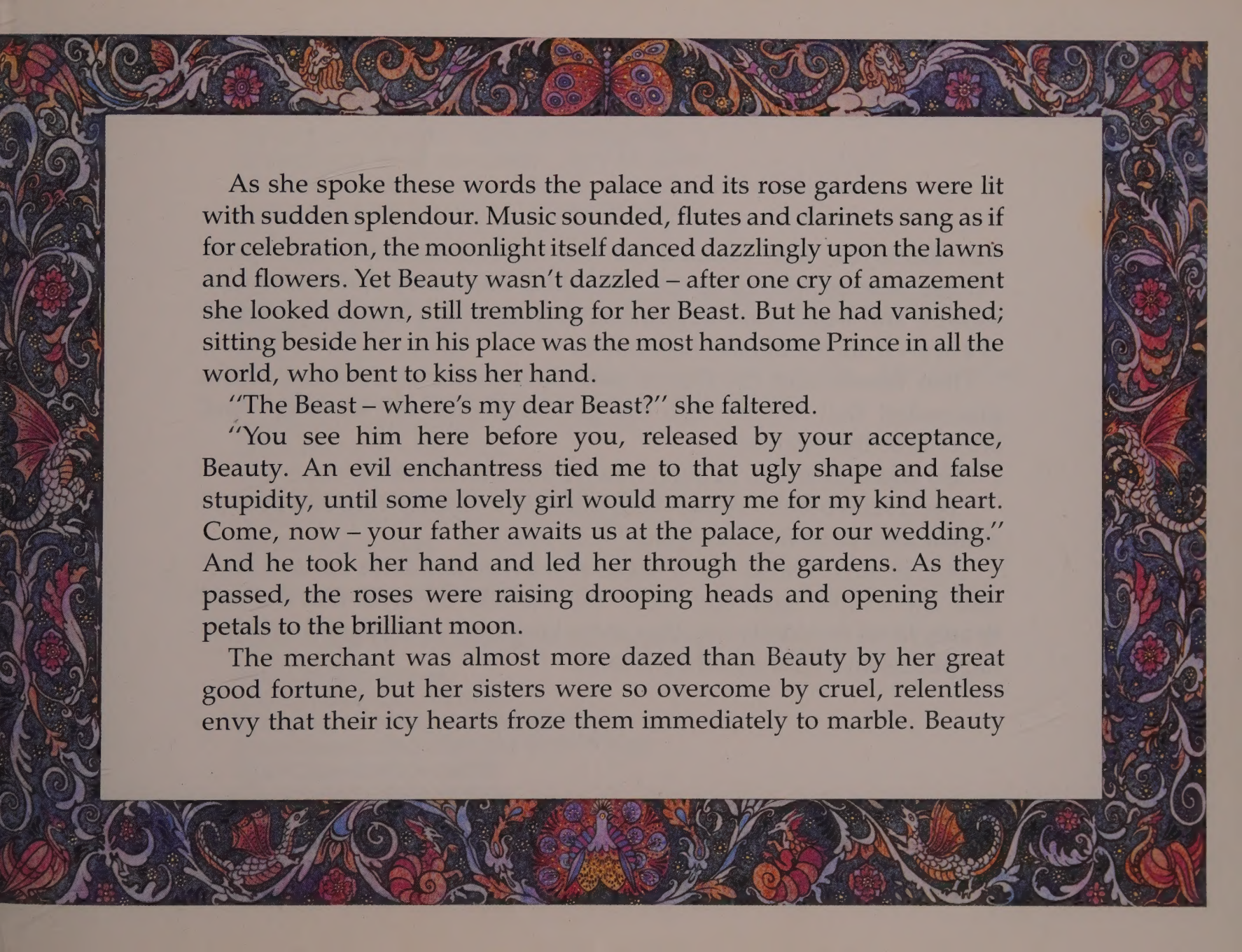
“Have I returned too late?” cried Beauty. And remembering her dream she ran into the gardens, searching despairingly. At last she discovered him lying limp and half-hidden by a rose hedge. His fur was matted, wet with dew; his paws bled as if he had been tearing at the roses; and he lay in shadow with eyes shut as though he’d retreated from the light. Beauty flung herself down beside him, and placed a hand upon his heart. At her touch the Beast’s eyes slowly opened, and he smiled.

“Beauty! I tried to starve myself, since you forgot me . . . Now at least I shall die happily . . .” His voice was weak.

“Live!” cried Beauty. “Live, and let us marry – how could I be without you, dearest Beast? I thought you so ugly – but now I love you more than all the world, and almost died of sorrow when I thought you dead.”





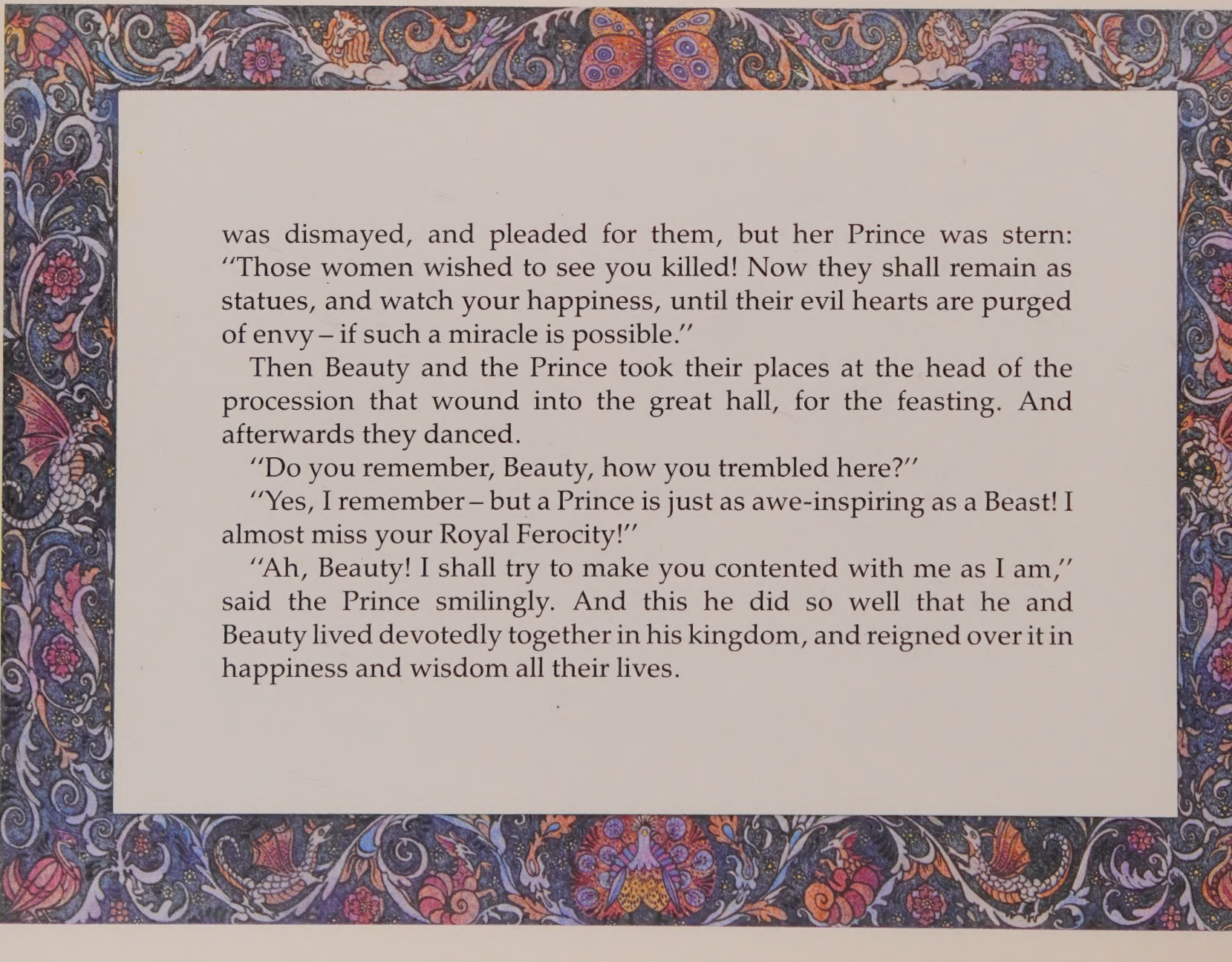


As she spoke these words the palace and its rose gardens were lit with sudden splendour. Music sounded, flutes and clarinets sang as if for celebration, the moonlight itself danced dazzlingly upon the lawns and flowers. Yet Beauty wasn't dazzled – after one cry of amazement she looked down, still trembling for her Beast. But he had vanished; sitting beside her in his place was the most handsome Prince in all the world, who bent to kiss her hand.

“The Beast – where's my dear Beast?” she faltered.

“You see him here before you, released by your acceptance, Beauty. An evil enchantress tied me to that ugly shape and false stupidity, until some lovely girl would marry me for my kind heart. Come, now – your father awaits us at the palace, for our wedding.” And he took her hand and led her through the gardens. As they passed, the roses were raising drooping heads and opening their petals to the brilliant moon.

The merchant was almost more dazed than Beauty by her great good fortune, but her sisters were so overcome by cruel, relentless envy that their icy hearts froze them immediately to marble. Beauty



was dismayed, and pleaded for them, but her Prince was stern: "Those women wished to see you killed! Now they shall remain as statues, and watch your happiness, until their evil hearts are purged of envy – if such a miracle is possible."

Then Beauty and the Prince took their places at the head of the procession that wound into the great hall, for the feasting. And afterwards they danced.

"Do you remember, Beauty, how you trembled here?"

"Yes, I remember – but a Prince is just as awe-inspiring as a Beast! I almost miss your Royal Ferocity!"

"Ah, Beauty! I shall try to make you contented with me as I am," said the Prince smilingly. And this he did so well that he and Beauty lived devotedly together in his kingdom, and reigned over it in happiness and wisdom all their lives.

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